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The Western perception of Islam and its Prophet has traditionally revolved around the axes of sex, violence, and deception. From the eleventh century onwards, Christian authors used these concepts to paint a predominantly negative picture of Islam, for mainly theological and apologetic purposes—a trend that was fortified by the lack of genuine information and reliable sources about Islam. Thus Mahomet[1] was typecast as a sex-obsessed, violent and Machiavellian trickster or impostor, the Qur'an discredited as pandering to the political and carnal desires of Mahomet and his followers, and Islam itself described as a false religion that spread by force and persecution, rather than by providence and grace.[2]

[1] Throughout this paper I will refer to Muhammad as "Mahomet," the name commonly used in early modern English and French. All English translations of Bayle are my own unless otherwise stated.

[2] Out of a vast historiography, see Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1960); Matthew Dimmock, *Mythologies of the Prophet Muhammad in Early Modern English Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Ziad Elmarsafy, *The Enlightenment Qur'an: The Politics of Translation and the Construction of Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009); Humberto Garcia, *Islam and the English Enlightenment, 1670–1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012); Ahmad Gunny, *Prophet Muhammad in French and English Literature: 1650 to the Present* (Markfield: Islamic Foundation, 2010); Jonathan Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man, 1670–1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 615–39; Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Jonathan Lyons, *Islam through Western Eyes: From the Crusades to the War on Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press,

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, however, some cracks began to show in this image, first subtle, then emphatic—especially when deist and Socinianizing philosophers in England, and later Germany and France, became attracted to what they perceived to be an extremely clear, simple, rationalist, and anti-Trinitarian theology. This development is particularly striking in the English context, where authors such as Arthur Bury and Stephen Nye flirted with the idea of "Unitarian" Islam, while Henry Stubbe drastically revaluated both Islam and Mahomet, praising the latter as "the wisest legislator that ever was" and a "great prophet."[3] Such sympathies had an immediate political twist, since in most cases they were closely connected to a powerful tolerationist impulse. By 1718, for instance, the Irish philosopher John Toland, in the footsteps of Stubbe, openly recast Islam as "Mahometan Christianity," in order to argue that Muslims "might with as much reason and safety be tolerated at London and Amsterdam, as the Christians of every kind are so at Constantinople and thro-out all Turkey."[4]

A few decades later, in 1730, a highly controversial biography of Mahomet by Henri, the count of Boulainvilliers, solidified the nascent image of Mahomet as an enlightened, rational, and proto-deist ruler and legislator, as well as of Islam as a reasonable religion, free of mystery and theological corruption.[5] Although both images of Mahomet (as wicked

2012); David A. Pailin, *Attitudes to Other Religions: Comparative Religion in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); Guy Stroumsa, *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 124–44; John V. Tolan, "European Accounts of Muhammad's Life," in *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, ed. Jonathan E. Brockopp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 226–50.

[3] Henry Stubbe, *Originall and Progress of Mahometanism* (written c. 1671 and circulated privately) in Stubbe and Nabil Matar, *Henry Stubbe and the Beginnings of Islam: The Originall & Progress of Mahometanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 192–93, 126, 206. On Stubbe, Toland, and the English context, see also Justin Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and its Enemies, 1660–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 99–132; James R. Jacob, *Henry Stubbe, Radical Protestantism and the Early Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Garcia, *Islam*, 30–59; Dimmock, *Mythologies*, 189–97.

[4] John Toland, *Nazarenus: or, Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity* (London, 1718), 5. Stubbe and Toland's anti-Trinitarian image of Islam is continued by the pseudonymous *Mahomet No Imposter* (1720) by "Abdulla Mahumed Omar"; see Dimmock, *Mythologies*, 197–98; Champion, *Pillars*, 120.

[5] Henri de Boulainvilliers, *La vie de Mahomed: Avec des réflexions sur la religion Mahométane, et les coutumes des Musulmans*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: Pierre Humbert, 1731). Note that Boulainvilliers was not the first to present Mahomet as a legislator, but earlier authors such as Stubbe and Toland addressed an Anglophone audience and were thus limited in their reach, whereas Boulainvilliers's work, published almost simultaneously in French (1730) and English (1731), was of acute and widespread impact. Also noteworthy

impostor or sage legislator) continued to coexist for a long time, the rival deist image proved to be as stubborn as its predecessor, influencing the views of many Enlightenment writers on the topic of Islam, including Gibbon, Goethe, Lessing, and Voltaire.[6]

The history of this gradual recasting of this image of Islam is too complex, subtle, and dynamic for this paper to do it justice. It is rooted in Reformation polemics, in the course of which Catholic authors attacked Protestants by associating their theological doctrines with those of Islam and snidely casting Mahomet as a precursor of Luther and Calvin. Some Protestant authors had reacted by accepting this association and arguing that, in fact, it is better to be grouped with Muslims than with Catholics: better to be with Mahomet than the Pope.[7] Others had used the Catholic critique of Muslim persecution practices against the Catholics' use of violence.[8] Such discussions, though springing from very specific apologetic contexts, had an ultimately positive (side) effect for the perception of Islam, at least in Protestant countries.

In the course of the seventeenth century, more people traveled to the East and penned their experiences;[9] more distinguished Orientalists devoted

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is the clandestine manuscript *Traité des trois imposteurs* (1719), but this presents Mahomet as primarily a (politically motivated) religious impostor, and is thus negatively charged: for contrasts with Boulainvilliers, see the articles by Silvia Berti and Roberto Festa in *Heterodoxy, Spinozism, and Free Thought in Early-Eighteenth-Century Europe: Studies on the* Traité des trois imposteurs, ed. Berti, Françoise Charles-Daubert, and Richard Popkin (Dordrecht: Springer, 1996).

[6] Voltaire is hard to categorize: having framed Mahomet as a fanatic in *Le fanatisme, ou Mahomet le prophète*, he later presents a more positive image in, e.g., his *Essai sur les mœurs*; see Magdy Gabriel Badir, *Voltaire et l'Islam*, vol. 125 of *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* (Banbury: Voltaire Foundation, 1974); Djavâd Hadidi, *Voltaire et l'Islam* (Paris: Publications Orientalistes de France, 1974).

[7] Ahmad Gunny, "Reactions to Islam in Late Seventeenth-Century French Protestant Thought," *French Studies* 40 (1986): 129–40, at 129; Wiep van Bunge, "Tolerating Turks? The Presence and Perception of Islam in the Dutch Republic," in *Duldung religiöser Vielfalt – Sorge um die wahre Religion: Toleranzdebatten in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Sascha Salatowksy and Winfried Schröder (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2016), 205–21, at 207–8, on the Dutch battle cry "better Turkish than Papist"; Dimmock, *Mythologies*, 77–89, on comparisons between Islam and the Papacy in (English) Reformation polemics.

[8] E.g., Pierre Jurieu, *Histoire du Calvinisme et celle du Papisme mises en parallèle* (Rotterdam: Reinier Leers, 1683), 1:512–53.

[9] Three influential examples are Pietro della Valle, Jean Chardin, and Paul Rycaut; Bayle mostly uses the latter. Israel (*Enlightenment Contested*, 616) and Stroumsa suggest that "Pierre Bayle's knowledge of Islam" is "very much indebted" to Pietro della Valle's travelogue (*New Science*, 126)—but this is mistaken, since Bayle had probably not read della Valle and never cites him in Mahomet; when he does so in other articles (e.g., Fatime) he is quoting via Bespier; see Joy Charnley, *Pierre Bayle, Reader of Travel Literature* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1998), 76–77.

themselves to studying the doctrines and practices of Islam;[10] and new and better translations of the Qur'an began to appear.[11] With regard to translations, this new critical impulse is especially striking, since, for the first time in this specific history, a long tradition of translations-of-translations was questioned. To give just one example, the first Dutch translation of the Qur'an (1641) was based on the 1616 German translation (by Salomon Schweigger), which was based on the 1547 Italian translation of the 1143 Latin translation (by Robert of Ketton) of the original Arabic text.[12] This practice changed (though was not abolished[13]) in the course of the seventeenth century, as is demonstrated by André du Ryer's 1647 French and Lodovico Marracci's 1698 Latin translations of the Qur'an, which were both taken directly from the Arabic.[14] Likewise, George Sale's hugely influential English translation of 1734, although indebted to Marracci, was again based primarily on the Arabic text.[15] However, the very fact that Sale's translation would serve as the basis for almost all other translations into European languages until the nineteenth century[16] seems to prove the point made by some scholars that this rise in oriental studies was temporary: particular to the seventeenth century, it soon dwindled in the eighteenth.[17]

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[10] Especially in Holland: Thomas Erpenius, Jacobius Golius, Levinus Warner; later Adriaan Reland and Albert Schultens (see, e.g., Arnoud Vrolijk and Richard van Leeuwen, *Arabic Studies in the Netherlands: A Short History in Portraits, 1580–1950*, trans. Alastair Hamilton [Leiden: Brill, 2014]); and England: Edward Pococke and Samuel Clarke; later Simon Ockley (see, e.g., Gerald Toomer, *Eastern Wisedome and Learning: The Study of Arabic in Seventeenth-Century England* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996]). France after 1645 produced "only translations, never originals" (Toomer, *Eastern Wisedome*, 33) until the late seventeenth century, with, e.g., Barthélemy d'Herbelot (*Bibliothèque Orientale*) and Antoine Galland. Germany became most influential in the eighteenth century with J. J. Reiske and J. D. Michaelis.

[11] On Qur'an translations, see Elmarsafy, *Enlightenment Qur'an* (esp. chaps. 1 and 2); for a full list of translations up to the Reformation, see Hartmut Bobzin, *Der Koran im Zeitalter der Reformation: Studien zur Frühgeschichte der Arabistik und Islamkunde in Europa* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1995), 38–88.

[12] Van Bunge, "Tolerating Turks?," 218; Bobzin, *Koran*, 271–72.

[13] Thus the Dutch translations of the Qur'an (1657, 1658, 1696, etc.) by Glazemaker were translations from Du Ryer's French, as was the first English translation of 1649.

[14] On Du Ryer, see especially Alastair Hamilton and Francis Richard, *André Du Ryer and Oriental Studies in Seventeenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); on Marracci (and Sale), see Alexander Bevilacqua, "The Qur'an Translations of Marracci and Sale," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 76 (2013): 93–130; Elmarsafy, *Enlightenment Qur'an*, 37–63. In Mahomet, Bayle uses both Du Ryer's French and Ketton's Latin translation.

[15] Lewis, *Islam*, 87; Pailin, *Attitudes*, 83; Bevilacqua, "Qur'an Translations," esp. 103–6; Elmarsafy, *Enlightenment Qur'an*, 37–63; Toomer, *Eastern Wisedome*, 308.

[16] Lewis, *Islam*, 87.

[17] Toomer, *Eastern Wisedome*, 309, 269–314; Alastair Hamilton, "The Study of Islam in

Whatever the endurance of this scholarly impetus, we can surely say that, by the turn of the eighteenth century, something changes, or has changed. This shift eastward of the Western gaze has been characterized in a number of ways, and sometimes too absolutely or univocally, but the fact that some changes have been overdrawn does not mean that change did not occur. It would go too far to speak of a "Mahometan moment"—but still, there is something resembling momentum. Most crucially, the vast and unexpected increase in knowledge about Islam in the seventeenth century went hand in hand with a heightening of curiosity and a gradual decrease in theological as well as philosophical hostility to Islamic thought and sources, including the Qur'an. As John Toland wrote in 1704: "if a Mahometan ought to read the Bible, I see no reason a Christian shou'd fear to read the Alcoran; which is as true of all the Books in the World."[18]

This new sympathetic tendency, however, was far from universal: it also served to reaffirm the urgency of discrediting Islam and Mahomet. Thus the freshly kindled interest in Islam went hand in hand with a new round of apologetic arguments, by Protestant as well as Catholic authors. To name just two examples, both the influential 1697 biography of Mahomet by the Anglican Humphrey Prideaux and the 1691/1698 refutation of Islam by the Catholic Lodovico Marracci combined scholarship with apologetics; the former directed against deists as well as Muslims; the latter using knowledge of the Qur'an and other Arabic sources in an attempt to destroy Islam with its own weapons.[19]

Later Edward Gibbon, in the fifth volume of his renowned *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1788), would criticize both the antipathetic Prideaux (the "doctor") and sympathetic Boulainvilliers (the "count") for having been too polemical, hence partial, in their exposition of Mahomet's

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Early Modern Europe," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 3 (2001): 169–82, at 182; Stroumsa, *New Science*, 132.

[18] Toland, *Letters to Serena* (London, 1704), 15. Thus Locke owned a Qur'an in Du Ryer's 1647 French translation and Benjamin Furly's library in Rotterdam had two Dutch editions; see John Harrison and Peter Laslett, *The Library of John Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 70; *Bibliotheca Furliana* (Rotterdam: Fritsch and Bohm, 1714), 124, 129. The publisher's catalogues of Bayle's printer Leers advertise three Qur'an editions: see Reinier Leers, *Eleven Catalogues by Reinier Leers (1692–1709): A Reproduction Edition*, ed. H. H. M. van Lieshout and Otto S. Lankhorst (Utrecht: HES, 1992), 109, 146, 254.

[19] Humphrey Prideaux, *The True Nature of Imposture Fully Displayed in the Life of Mahomet*, 2nd ed. (London: William Rogers, 1697); Lodovico Marracci, *Prodromus ad refutationem Alcorani*, first published in 1691, and again in 1698: this time with the Arabic text of the Qur'an and a fully annotated Latin translation (*Alcorani textus universus* . . .).

life: "the adverse wish of finding an impostor or an hero, has too often corrupted the learning of the doctor and the ingenuity of the count."[20] Instead, Gibbon famously set out to achieve an objective, naturalistic, and (at least *theoretically*) impartial history of religion, in which divine actions and supernatural causes have no place, since, for Gibbon, the object of historical inquiry should not be to project a positive or negative image of Mahomet and Islam, according to the argument that one wishes to make, but rather to reconstruct historical fact from those sources available; or, as Gibbon says on a different occasion, to "separate (if it be possible) a few authentic, as well as interesting, facts from an undigested mass of fiction and error."[21]

In this critical impulse, which of course had implications for the history of Christianity as well as for that of Islam, Gibbon was prefigured by an earlier writer, and a different book, which left a deep imprint on the long eighteenth century and on Enlightenment Europe as a whole. That writer is the French philosopher Pierre Bayle, and the book is his *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, first published in 1696.[22]

BAYLE'S "MAHOMET"

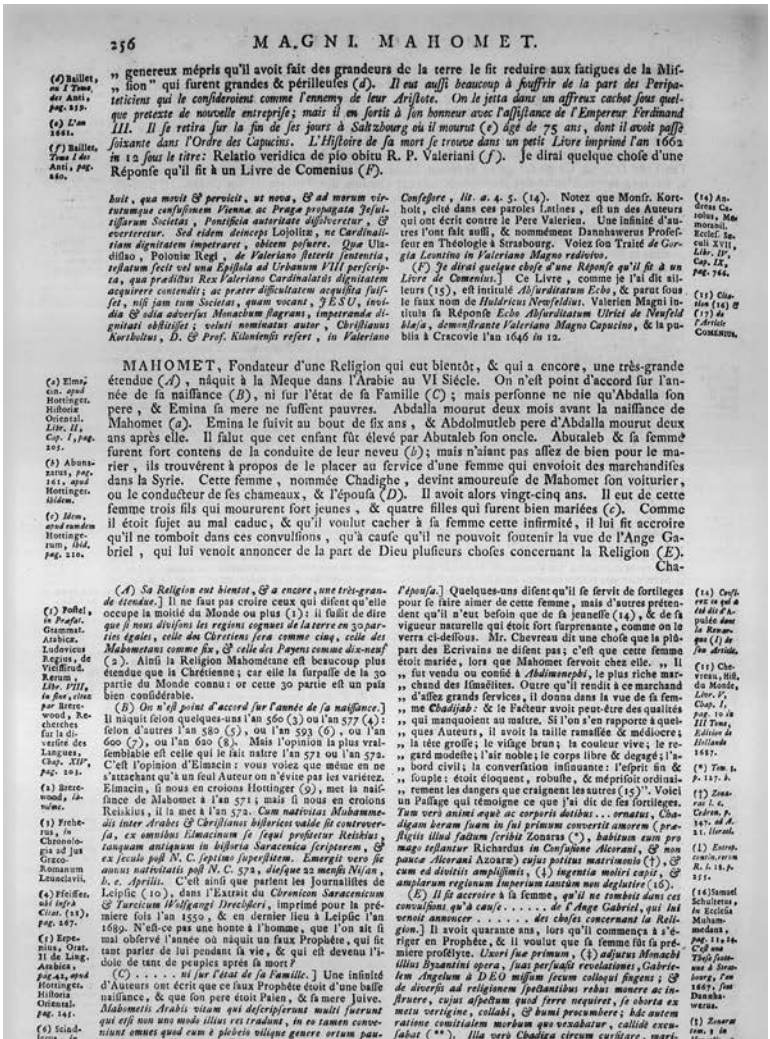
There is no easy way to introduce either Bayle or the *Dictionnaire*. Bayle's background is a curious one: born a French Calvinist, he had (like Gibbon) converted to Catholicism for a brief period in his youth, and had joined the Huguenot Refuge in the Netherlands in 1681, a few years before Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes.[23] From the 1680s onwards he published a

[20] Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. David Womersley (New York: Penguin Classics, 1995), 3:190 (chap. 50; all references to Gibbon refer to this chapter unless otherwise stated).

[21] Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, 1:485 (chap. 16). On Gibbon's historical method, see, e.g., Arnaldo Momigliani, "Gibbon's Contribution to Historical Method," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 2, no. 4 (1954): 450–63; Peter Ghosh, "Gibbon Observed," *Journal of Roman Studies* 81 (Nov. 1991): 132–56; Stephen Paul Foster, *Melancholy Duty: The Hume–Gibbon Attack on Christianity* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1997), 307–31.

[22] For Bayle's influence on Gibbon, see David Jordan, *Gibbon and His Roman Empire* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 168–72. Another critical influence is Adriaan Reland's *De Religione Mohammedica* (Utrecht: Wilhelm Broedelet, 1705), which Gibbon calls "excellent" (*Decline*, 3:184). Note that John Pocock, in *Barbarism and Religion* (6 vols., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999–2015; esp. vols. 1 and 5), though acutely perceptive of many of Gibbon's sources and influences, does not sufficiently acknowledge Bayle's impact on the *Decline and Fall*, which is profound, not only in chapter 50 (on Islam) but also chapters 15 and 16 (on Christianity).

[23] On Bayle's conversion, see Hubert Bost, *Pierre Bayle* (Paris, 2006), 40–52; Élisabeth Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle, tome I: Du pays de Foix à la cité d'Érasme* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1985), 50–74; on Gibbon's, see Jordan, *Gibbon*, 9–11.



256 MAGNI MAHOMET.

(d) Baillet, *ou I Tome, des Anti., pag.* 259.

(e) *L'an* 1661.

(f) Baillet, *Tome I des Anti., pag.* 260.

„ genereux mépris qu'il avoit fait des grandeurs de la terre le fit reduire aux fatigues de la Miſ„ ſion" qui furent grandes & périlleuſes (*d*). *Il eut auſſi beaucoup à ſouffrir de la part des Peripateticiens qui le conſideroient comme l'ennemy de leur Ariſtote. On le jetta dans un affreux cachot ſous quelque pretexte de nouvelle entrepriſe; mais il en ſortit à ſon honneur avec l'aſſiſtance de l'Empereur Ferdinand III. Il ſe retira ſur la fin de ſes jours à Saltzbourg où il mourut* (*e*) *âgé de 75 ans, dont il avoit paſſé ſoixante dans l'Ordre des Capucins. L'Hiſtoire de ſa mort ſe trouve dans un petit Livre imprimé l'an* 1662 *in* 12 *ſous le titre:* Relatio veridica de pio obitu R. P. Valeriani (*f*). Je dirai quelque choſe d'une Réponſe qu'il fit à un Livre de Comenius (*F*).

huit, qua movit & pervicit, ut nova, & ad morum virtutumque conſuſionem Vienna ac Praga propagata Jeſuitiſarum Societas, Pontificia auctoritate diſſiveretur, & everteretur. Sed eidem deinceps Lojolitæ, *ne Cardinalitiam dignitatem impetraret, obſtem poſuere. Quæ* Ulcidiſus, Polonie Regi, *de Valeriano ſteterit ſententia, teſtatum fecit vel una Epiſtola ad Urbanum VIII perſcripta, qua prædictus Rex Valeriano Cardinalatis dignitatem acquirere contendit; ac præter difficultatem acquiſita ſuiſſet, niſi jam tum Societas, quam vocant, JESU, invidia & odia adverſus Monachum flagrans, impetrande dignitati obſtitiſſet; veluti nominatus autor, Chriſtianus Kortholtus, D. & Prof. Kilonienſis refert, in Valeriano Confeſſore, lit. a. 4. 5.* (14). Notez que Monſr. Kortholt, cité dans ces paroles Latines, eſt un des Auteurs qui ont écrit contre le Pere Valerien. Une infinité d'autres l'ont fait auſſi, & nommément Dannhawerus Profeſſeur en Théologie à Strasbourg. Voiez ſon Traité *de Gorgia Leontino in Valeriano Magno redivivo.*

(*F*) *Je dirai quelque choſe d'une Réponſe qu'il fit à un Livre de Comenius.*] Ce Livre, comme je l'ai dit ailleurs (15), eſt intitulé *Abſurditatum Echo*, & parut ſous le faux nom de *Huldricus Newfeldius*. Valerien Magni intitula ſa Réponſe *Echo Abſurditatum Ulrici de Newfeld blaſa, demonſtrante Valeriano Magno Capucino*, & la publia à Cracovie l'an 1646 *in* 12.

(14) Andreas Colſius, *Mercurii Reciſci Ingenii XVII, Lib. IV, Cap. IX, pag.* 766.

(15) Citation (14) & (17) de l'Article COMENIUS.

(a) Elmacin. *apud* Hottinget. Hiſtoriæ Oriental. *Lib. II, Cap. I, pag.* 205.

(b) Abunazarius, *pag.* 161. *apud* Hottinget. *ibidem.*

(c) *Idem, apud eundem* Hottingerum, *ibid. pag.* 210.

MAHOMET, Fondateur d'une Religion qui eut bientôt, & qui a encore, une très-grande étendue (*A*), nâquit à la Meque dans l'Arabie au VI Siécle. On n'eſt point d'accord ſur l'année de ſa naiſſance (*B*), ni ſur l'état de ſa Famille (*C*); mais perſonne ne nie qu'Abdalla ſon pere, & Emina ſa mere ne fuſſent pauvres. Abdalla mourut deux mois avant la naiſſance de Mahomet (*a*). Emina le ſuivit au bout de ſix ans, & Abdolmutleb pere d'Abdalla mourut deux ans après elle. Il falut que cet enfant fût élevé par Abutaleb ſon oncle. Abutaleb & ſa femme furent fort contens de la conduite de leur neveu (*b*); mais n'aiant pas aſſez de bien pour le marier, ils trouvérent à propos de le placer au ſervice d'une femme qui envoioit des marchandiſes dans la Syrie. Cette femme, nommée Chadighe, devint amoureuſe de Mahomet ſon voiturier, ou le conducteur de ſes chameaux, & l'épouſa (*D*). Il avoit alors vingt-cinq ans. Il eut de cette femme trois fils qui moururent fort jeunes, & quatre filles qui furent bien mariées (*c*). Comme il étoit ſujet au mal caduc, & qu'il voulut cacher à ſa femme cette infirmité, il lui fit accroire qu'il ne tomboit dans ces convulſions, qu'à cauſe qu'il ne pouvoit ſoutenir la vue de l'Ange Gabriel, qui lui venoit annoncer de la part de Dieu pluſieurs choſes concernant la Religion (*E*). Cha-

(*A*) *Sa Religion eut bientôt, & a encore, une très-grande étendue.*] Il ne faut pas croire ceux qui diſent qu'elle occupe la moitié du Monde ou plus (1): il ſuffit de dire *que ſi nous diviſons les regions connues de la terre en* 30 *parties égales, celle des Chrétiens ſera comme cinq, celle des Mahometans comme ſix, & celle des Payens comme dix-neuf* (2). Ainſi la Religion Mahométane eſt beaucoup plus étendue que la Chrétienne; car elle la ſurpaſſe de la 30 partie du Monde connu: or cette 30 partie eſt un pais bien conſidérable.

(*B*) *On n'eſt point d'accord ſur l'année de ſa naiſſance.*] Il nâquit ſelon quelques-uns l'an 560 (3) ou l'an 577 (4): ſelon d'autres l'an 580 (5), ou l'an 593 (6), ou l'an 600 (7), ou l'an 620 (8). Mais l'opinion la plus vraiſemblable eſt celle qui le fait naître l'an 571 ou l'an 572. C'eſt l'opinion d'Elmacin: vous voiez que même on ne s'attachant qu'à un ſeul Auteur on n'évite pas les variétez. Elmacin, ſi nous en croions Hottinger (9), met la naiſſance de Mahomet à l'an 571; mais ſi nous en croions Reiskius, il la met à l'an 572. *Cum nativitas Muhammedis inter Arabes & Chriſtianos hiſtericos valde ſit controverſa, ex omnibus Elmacinum ſe ſequi profiteur Reiskius, tanquam antiquum in hiſtoria Saracenica ſcriptorem, & ex ſeculo poſt N. C. ſeptimo ſuperſtitem. Emergit vero ſic annus nativitatis poſt N. C. 572, dieſque* 22 *menſis Niſan, h. e. Aprilis.* C'eſt ainſi que parlent les Journaliſtes de Leipſic (10), dans l'Extrait du *Chronicon Saracenicum & Turcicum Wolfgangi Dreckleri*, imprimé pour la premiere fois l'an 1550, & en dernier lieu à Leipſic l'an 1689. N'eſt-ce pas une honte à l'homme, que l'on ait ſi mal obſervé l'année où nâquit un faux Prophête, qui ſit tant parler de lui pendant ſa vie, & qui eſt devenu l'idole de tant de peuples après ſa mort?

(*C*) . . . . . *ni ſur l'état de ſa Famille.*] Une infinité d'Auteurs ont écrit que ce faux Prophête étoit d'une baſſe naiſſance, & que ſon pere étoit Paien, & ſa mere Juive. *Mahometis Arabi vitam qui deſcripſerunt multi fuerunt qui eſſe non uno modo illius res tradunt, in eo tamen convenisse omnes quod cum è plebeis infime generis ortum parentibus parentibus, patre Edonico, matre Judæa affirmant* (11). Mr. Moreri a ſuivi ce ſentiment, qui eſt peu conforme aux Auteurs Arabes: ils ne prétendent pas que le pere de Mahomet fût riche: mais ils ſoutiennent qu'il étoit de grande naiſſance, & que la Tribu des Coreiſchites, à laquelle il appartenoit, ſurpaſſoit en rang & en dignité toutes les autres Tribus Arabes (12). Ibn Chaſnah Auteur Arabe dit expreſſément qu'Emine étoit de cette Tribu, & cela eſt fort vrai-ſemblable, vu que les Arabes gardent encore aujourd'hui fort exactement la coutume de ſe marier avec des femmes de leur tribu (13).

(*D*) *Chadighe devint amoureuſe de Mahomet . . . . . & l'épouſa.*] Quelques-uns diſent qu'il ſe ſervit de ſortileges pour ſe faire aimer de cette femme, mais d'autres prétendent qu'il n'eut beſoin que de ſa jeuneſſe (14), & de ſa vigueur naturelle qui étoit fort ſurprenante, comme on le verra ci-deſſous. Mr. Chevreau dit une choſe que la plûpart des Ecrivains ne diſent pas; c'eſt que cette femme étoit mariée, lors que Mahomet ſervoit chez elle. „ Il „ fut vendu ou confié à *Abdimenephi*, le plus riche mar„ chand des Ismaëlites. Outre qu'il rendit à ce marchand „ d'aſſez grands ſervices, il donna dans le vue de ſa fem„ me *Chadijah*: & le Facteur avoit peut-être des qualités „ qui manquoient au maître. Si l'on s'en rapporte à quel„ ques Auteurs, il avoit la taille ramaſſée & médiocre; „ la tête groſſe; le viſage brun; la couleur vive; le re„ gard modeſte; l'air noble; le corps libre & degagé; l'a„ bord civil; la converſation inſinuante: l'eſprit fin & „ ſouple: il étoit éloquent, robuſte, & méprisoit ordina„ rement les dangers que craignent les autres (15)". Voici un Paſſage qui témoigne ce que j'ai dit de ſes fortileges. *Tum veri animi aquè ac corporis dotibus . . . ornatus, Chadigam beram ſuam in ſui primum convertit amorem (præſtigiis illud factum ſcribit* Zonaras (*), *habitum tam pro mago teſtantur* Richardus *in Confuſione Alcorani, & non pauca Alcorani* Azoare) *cujus potitus matrimonio* (†), *& cum ea divitiis amplioſimis,* (‡) *ingentia moliri cepit, & amplorum regionum Imperium tantùm non deglutire* (16).

(*E*) *Il ſe accroire à ſa femme, qu'il ne tomboit dans ces convulſions qu'à cauſe . . . . . de l'Ange Gabriel, qui lui venoit annoncer . . . . . des choſes concernant la Religion.*] Il avoit quarante ans, lors qu'il commença à s'ériger en Prophête, & il voulut que ſa femme fût ſa première proſelyte. *Uxori ſuæ primum,* (‡) *adjutus Monachi illius Byzantini opera, ſuas perſuaſit revelationes, Gabrielem Angelum à DEO miſſum ſecum colloqui fingens; & de diverſis ad religionem ſpectantibus rebus monere ac inſtruere, cujus aſpectum quod ferre nequiret, ſe oborta ex metu vertigine, collabi, & humi procumbere; hâc autem ratione comitialem morbum quo vexabatur, callidè excuſabat* (**). *Illa verò Chadiga circum curſitare, maritum ſuum ceu Prophetam deprædicare, in eundemque errorem alias gentiles ſuas pertrudere, pari* (††) *ratione manere fungente ſervo Zeidi, aliiſque,* (14) *quos auro corruperat Muhammed* (17). S'il voulut commencer par la ſéduction de ſa femme, ce ne fut pas dans la vue de ſe ſervir de l'artifice de preſque tous les Novateurs. Ils affectent l'ardeur des dévotes, & d'employer les intrigues & le zéle de quelques femmes pour réuſſir dans leur deſſein. Mahomet, comme on le verra ci-deſſous, (18), négligea ce ſtratagême. Il eut des femmes & des concubines en fort grand nombre; mais ce fut pour l'uſage naturel, pour le remede de ſon incontinence, pour le plaiſir vénérien, en un

(1) Poſtel, *in Præfat. Grammat. Arabicæ.* Ludovicus Regius, de Vrieſſind. Rerum, *Lib. VIII, in fine, cited par* Brerewood, Recherches ſur la diverſité des Langues, *Chap. XIII, pag.* 203.

(2) Brerewood, *ſubſeq.*

(3) Prideaux, *in* Chronologia ad jus Græco-Romanum Leunclavii.

(4) Pfeiffer, *ubi ſupra Cent.* (13), *pag.* 267.

(5) Epiphanius, Orat. II de Ling. Arabica, *pag.* 42, *apud* Hottinget. Hiſtoria Oriental. *pag.* 145.

(6) Sciadicus, *in* Lexico, *apud* Hornb. Summa Controv. *pag. m.* 74.

(7) *Vita* Genebr. Chronol.

(8) Joh. Andreas, *in* Confuſione Sectæ Mahommedicæ, *apud* Hotting. Hiſt. Orient. *pag.* 145. (9) Hiſtor. Orient. *pag.* 142. (10) Acta Eruditor. Lipſ. 1689, *pag.* 177. (11) Ludovicus Godefredus, *in* Archonol. Conſtogt. *apud* Hotting. Hiſtor. Oriental. *pag.* 136. (12) Hottinger. *ibidem, p.* 137. (13) *Ibidem, pag.* 136.

(14) *Conſtruxit ex qui a ibi diſſipulâſſe dans la Remarque* (*) *de ſon Article.*

(15) Chevreau, Hiſt. du Monde, *Liv. V, Chap. I, pag.* 10 *de la III Tome, Edition de Hollande* 1687.

(*) *Tom. I. p.* 117. *b.*

(†) Zonaras *l. c. Cedren. p.* 340. *ed. Paris. literali.*

(‡) Entretiens, rerum *R. l.* 18. *p.* 251.

(16) Samuel Schultetus, *in* Ecclesia Mahomedana, *pag.* 11, 14. C'eſt une Theſe ſoutenue à Strasbourg, l'an 1667. ſous Dannhawerus.

(**) Zonaras *tom. 2 in Heraclio, p. m.* 112. *b. Cedrenus. p.* 347.

(††) *Cedrenus ad. Heraclium. p.* 347. *Ita Anaſtaſius Bibliothecarius & alii ap. Baron. ad A. 630. n.* 2.

(††) *Cedr. l. c. Baronius. annal. rerum Rom. l.* 18. *pag.* 351. (14) *Elmac. Hiſt. Sar. l.* 1. *c.* 1. *apud Hottinge. l. c. pag.* 217. (17) Schultetus, *in* Eccleſ. Mahammed. *pag.* 14. (18) *Dans la Remarque* (Q).

FIGURE 1. First page of article "Mahomet," in Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, ed. Pierre Desmaizeaux (Amsterdam/Leiden/The Hague/Utrecht, 1740). Photo ARTFL database.

number of writings that would prove to be as influential as they were controversial: arguing, for instance, that atheists could be virtuous, and delivering a plea for religious toleration that went further than any of his day, extending to Catholics, Jews, and Muslims, as well as (effectively) atheists. His dictionary, a vast display of historical erudition, was amply stocked with theological and philosophical arguments, as well as so-called "obscenities" that would cater to the most subversive of tastes.

The content and form of the *Dictionnaire* immediately earned it a wide readership—but they also make the work immensely difficult to interpret.[24] It is often unclear whether Bayle is writing as an impartial observer, as a critical historian, or as a (moral, political, metaphysical) philosopher. This complexity, of course, is precisely what made his work so provocative, and what makes it so interesting for scholars today. In some articles, especially, Bayle presents us with a cross-section of those theological, philosophical, and historical debates that were current at the turn of the eighteenth century, and, in doing so, tells us as much about the intellectual climate of his day as he does about his own ideas and concerns. Such is the case with his article on "Mahomet," which was read across Europe by authors as diverse as Toland (whose *Letter from an Arabian Physician* of 1706 almost literally echoes passages by Bayle), Mathurin Veyssière de La Croze, Voltaire, Goethe, and Lessing, as well as most eighteenth-century biographers of Mahomet, from Boulainvilliers and Gagnier to Sale and Gibbon.[25]

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[24] The classic opposing interpretations of Bayle's corpus remain Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle, tome II: Hétérodoxie et rigorisme* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1996), and Gianluca Mori, *Bayle philosophe* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999). The existing literature on Bayle's "Mahomet" tends to be cursory and unspecific; a recent attempt ends in a gross exaggeration: "On peut dire qu'à cet égard Bayle a été un des pères de la laïcité; il est certain qu'il a été, en tout cas, le premier à jeter un regard neutre sur l'islam." Pierre Joxe, "Bayle, 'Mahomet' et l'islam," in *Le Rayonnement de Bayle*, ed. Philippe de Robert (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2010), 165–72, at 172.

[25] See, e.g., Gunny, *Prophet Muhammad*, 15, 55, on Bayle's influence on Veyssière de La Croze's "Réflexions historiques sur le mahométisme et sur le socinianisme," in *Dissertations historiques et critiques sur divers sujets* (Rotterdam: Reinier Leers, 1707; published in English in 1712); Katharina Mommsen, *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, trans. Michael M. Metzger (Rochester, N. Y.: Camden House, 2014), 378; Hugh Barr Nisbet, "Lessing and Pierre Bayle," in *Tradition and Creation: Essays in Honour of Elizabeth Mary Wilkinson*, ed. C. P. Magill, Brian A. Rowley, and Christopher J. Smith (Leeds: W. S. Maney and Son, 1978), 13–29; Nisbet, *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: His Life, Works, and Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 300. The extent of Bayle's influence on Voltaire's writings on Islam awaits further inquiry: Voltaire hardly mentions his sources, but he was an avid reader of the *Dictionnaire*, and there are several striking echoes of Bayle in the chapters on Islam in the *Essai sur les mœurs* (e.g., 1:289: on the contrasting principles and practices of Islam and Christianity). On Bayle's influence on Voltaire's *Mahomet*, see Haydn Trevor Mason, *Pierre Bayle and Voltaire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 50–51.

Totaling around 34,000 words, 39 Remarks, and 281 marginal footnotes in the final edition prepared by Bayle, "Mahomet" is one of Bayle's longest articles by far, second only to "Spinoza."[26] The main article (see fig. 1) discusses the life of Mahomet and the origins of Islam, mentioning, for instance, the many historical uncertainties about the year of Mahomet's birth and about his family, and introducing his various wives. But the main article itself only provides the initial framework for Bayle's historical-critical discussion of Islam and Mahomet, which mostly takes place in the Remarks, arranged alphabetically from A to Z and then from AA to QQ.[27] As could be seen from even a cursory glance at the titles of the Remarks, Bayle's "Mahomet" comprises many different topics—from Muslim martyrology to veneration of the camel—which cannot all be discussed here. Instead, I will proceed by grouping the articles into four themes, two "minor" and two "major":

Minor:

1. Critique of miracles and legends about Mahomet.
2. Religious imposture and fanaticism.

Major:

3. The role of force in the establishment of Islam.
4. Sexual morality and attitudes towards women in Islam.

The first of the two "minor" themes focuses on the abundance of far-fetched stories told about Mahomet, especially by Christian authors. As the very title of the historical-critical dictionary suggests, Bayle purports to write history critically, examining evidence in order to uncover historical fact. In the case of Islam, Bayle was limited by not knowing Arabic (or English): he depended on French and Latin translations of Arabic sources, including the Qur'an.[28] Nevertheless, this critical effort is strong in "Mahomet," where Bayle repeatedly criticizes Christian authors for exaggerating

[26] H. H. M. van Lieshout, *The Making of Pierre Bayle's* Dictionnaire Historique et Critique, trans. Lynne Richards (Amsterdam: APA-Holland University Press, 2001), 251. Bayle prepared three editions of the dictionary: in 1696, 1702, and 1720; the latter was published posthumously. I will cite the fourth edition, of 1740 (Amsterdam: Pierre Brunel et al.), while indicating the origin of any passage: e.g., Mahomet$_1$.AA (article "Mahomet," Remark AA, passage present in the first edition).

[27] Note that the organization of Remarks differs between editions; I here use the 1740 ordering.

[28] A note on Bayle's sources: in the first edition he especially cites Paul Rycaut, *Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1668) in the 1677 translation by Bespier (see Charnley, *Pierre Bayle*, 49); Hottinger, *Historia Orientalis* (1651); Marracci, *Prodromus ad refutationem Alcorani* (1691); also Pococke's *Specimen historiae Arabum* (1649). Though Bayle is sometimes represented as borrowing mainly from Prideaux's *True Nature of Imposture*

stories about Mahomet in order to put him in a bad light. To do so is "to violate the equity that we owe to all people, to the wicked as well as to the good. One must never impute to people that which they have not done."[29] Hence, throughout "Mahomet," Bayle tries to debunk such narratives, in order to attain a more charitable and objective image of both Islam and its Prophet—whether successfully remains to be seen.

The second "minor" theme revolves around the classic question of intention: Christian writers had long posed and tried to answer the question of whether Mahomet was an impostor or a fanatic; that is, whether he himself believed in his own prophecies. Most authors had opted for imposture, which was the most straightforward way of saving the divine status of Jesus and Christianity in contrast to that of Mahomet and Islam.[30] Bayle, too, raises this question, only to waver between the possible responses. Both alternatives are, of course, negatively charged and associated with falsehood and deception, but there is an important difference between the two. If Mahomet was himself deceived, and not the deceiver, this might exonerate him to some extent—at least according to Bayle's own toleration doctrine, which was based on the rights of the erring conscience. Error, for Bayle, if fully and honestly believed, has the same rights as truth; hence, in matters of religious belief (if not morality), false and true beliefs can claim an equal right to toleration.[31]

In the background of this question of intention stands a polemic between Bayle and his bitterest enemy, the formidable Protestant theologian Pierre Jurieu, whose political and moral doctrines on toleration were diametrically opposed to Bayle's. Subtly, and deviously, Bayle uses the question of Mahomet's intentions in order to question those of Jurieu, whom he perceived to be (like Mahomet) either a fanatic or an impostor. In the case of Mahomet, Bayle ends up choosing rather hesitantly the option of imposture—for various reasons.[32] I will return to these themes shortly, but

(1697; French trans., 1698), the first edition of the *Dictionnaire* (and the bulk of "Mahomet") in fact precedes Prideaux as well as d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque Orientale* (1697): Bayle incorporates these new sources in the second edition (1702). For Bayle's use of travel literature, especially in other articles (e.g., Fatime$_1$), see Charnley, *Pierre Bayle*. On the Qur'an editions used by Bayle, see n46.

[29] Mahomet$_1$.H.

[30] See Dimmock, *Mythologies*, 170–82, who contrasts the early modern concept of imposture with "earlier Catholic terminology" such as heresy, and connects it to Protestant discourses in the Reformation. Various eighteenth-century writers would take exception to the common narrative of imposture (as displayed in, e.g., Prideaux's *Life of Mahomet*): see, e.g., George Sale's "Preliminary Discourse" to his Qur'an translation (London: J. Wilcox, 1734), 39.

[31] Bayle, *Commentaire philosophique* (1686), and *Supplément* (1689).

[32] See Mara van der Lugt, *Bayle, Jurieu, and the* Dictionnaire Historique et Critique

first I will focus on the two major items of "Mahomet," which have to do with the role of violence and sexuality in the history of Islam—that is: with war and sex.

WAR

The Role of Force in the Establishment of Islam

The first of these themes (the relationship between Islam and violence) combines a critical reappraisal of the history of Islam with a general critique of Christian apologetics. The starting point of this discussion is the question of the secret of Mahomet's success, which was a classic problem for Christian apologists throughout the centuries.[33] The quick propagation and wide extension of Christianity were traditionally supposed to be miraculous; hence they were often held up as convincing proofs of Christianity's divinity. After all, so argued Christian authors, it would have been impossible for any religion to have spread so quickly and so widely without divine assistance: without the hand of God. In his earlier work *Pensées diverses sur la comète* (1682), Bayle had already criticized the apologetic premise that the quick propagation of Christianity is a sure sign of its divinity: indeed, Bayle resisted any attempt to find proofs of divinity in historical events; to interpret history in order to fit a religious story.[34] In "Mahomet," Bayle tackles the apologetic argument anew, this time specifically in the context of Islam.

In the very first footnote ("A"), Bayle provocatively states what he considers to be a historical fact: not only did the Mahometan religion spread very quickly, but it is now more widespread than the Christian religion.[35] In a series of other footnotes, he then addresses an item of major concern among the apologists: if the quick propagation of a religion is a sign of its divinity, what then to make of the historical rise of Islam, which is equally impressive in terms of both propagation and extension? Clearly, if the providential character of the development of Christianity is to be preserved, a

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 129–33. Gibbon shares Bayle's hesitation: "From enthusiasm to imposture, the step is perilous and slippery . . . the conscience may slumber in a mixed and middle state between self-illusion and voluntary fraud" (*Decline*, 3:213).

[33] Pailin, *Attitudes*, 99ff.

[34] See also the controversial chapter 15 of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, describing Christianity's propagation in natural terms.

[35] Mahomet$_1$.A.

different "natural" explanation is needed to explain the success of Islam. How did Mahomet create a body of followers that lasts up to this day?

Bayle engages with two traditional answers to this question.

Reduction to Sensuality

The first—which briefly takes us away from the topic of war—can be called a *reduction to sensuality*. Various Christian apologists had argued that converts to Islam were seduced by the perceived "looser" sexual morality of Islam, combined with Mahomet's promise of a sensual paradise for the faithful. Hence, if the success of Christianity manifested the hand of God, the conversion success of Islam could be reduced to natural causes: to the base passions and desires of the convert.[36]

Bayle rejects such explanations, for two reasons. First of all, he says in Remark L, far from expounding looser moral rules, Mahomet instated *more* ceremonies and *stricter* precepts: Mahomet's law was in fact more rigid than that of the Gospel, except in matters concerning marriage and revenge.[37] With regard to Mahomet's moral rules, Bayle makes the remarkable statement that "without flattering this religion, these aphorisms contain the most excellent precepts . . . for the practice of virtue and the rejection of vice."[38] Secondly, Bayle continues in Remark M, neither can Mahomet's success be explained by his promise of a sensual paradise, for the pleasures Mahomet offers to his followers remain limited to the senses, while the delights of the Christian paradise are represented as surpassing the very bounds of our imagination and senses.[39]

He then introduces a digression on the nature of pleasure, arguing that even the most hedonistic or pleasure-seeking people ("*voluptueux*") would, upon consideration, prefer the Christian paradise, since they do not care about the *source* of pleasure (whether it comes from the senses or the mind), but only about the *amount* or *quality* of pleasure they receive. Perhaps naively, or ironically, Bayle argues as follows: if such a "voluptuous" man knew he would experience more pleasure in examining a geometric problem than in making love to a beautiful woman, he would happily leave this

[36] See, e.g., Daniel, *Islam*, esp. 171–80; Pailin, *Attitudes*, 97–99; Tolan, "European Accounts," 227–28.
[37] Mahomet$_1$.L. For similar critiques, see Boulainvilliers, *Vie de Mahomed*, 182; Gibbon, *Decline*, 3:186.
[38] Mahomet$_1$.L.
[39] Mahomet$_1$.M.

beautiful woman for the geometric problem. Likewise, he would most likely prefer the Christian paradise, with its all-surpassing intellectual pleasures, to the Muslim one. "What do I care, they would say, that the Christian Paradise does not furnish the pleasures of fine food and the enjoyment of beautiful women, etc., since it furnishes other pleasures that infinitely surpass the greatest delights on earth?"[40] The promise of a *sensual* paradise, therefore, is not a greater drive to conversion than the promise of an *intellectual* one; and so it is unlikely to have caused the success of Islam.[41]

Reduction to Violence

There was, however, another traditional explanation of Mahomet's success, which can be called a *reduction to violence*. Almost all apologists argued that Mahomet had disseminated his religion by the sword, whereas Christianity spread peacefully, by the power of truth alone. Look no further, says Bayle: if we want to preserve the proof of Christianity's divinity based on propagation, this is the only suitable explanation for Mahomet's success: we have to associate Christianity with peace, and Islam with war.[42] But there's a snag. The explanation only works, says Bayle, if we focus solely on the spread of Christianity in the first three centuries after Christ. For after that, haven't many Christian apologists themselves argued that their religion must be spread by sword, blood, and fire, that non-Christians must be compelled to enter the Church? Haven't Christians (especially Catholics) persecuted the hell out of other religions?

Yes, says Bayle. They have.[43] And then, in a typically Baylean move, he turns his argument inside out, or upside down. Having seemed to confirm the intrinsically violent nature of Islam, Bayle now draws attention to the long tradition of *toleration* within Islam.[44] For although the traditional image of Christianity as a religion of peace and of Islam as a religion of war

[40] Mahomet$_1$.M.

[41] Other authors defended the concept of a sensual paradise by arguing that the resurrection of the body makes no sense without the restoration of the senses: e.g., Stubbe, *Original*, 203–4; Toland, *A Letter from an Arabian Physician* (Paris, 1706), 10–15; Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs* (1775), 1:282; Gibbon, *Decline*, 3:189.

[42] Mahomet$_1$.N.

[43] Mahomet$_1$.O. See also chapter 16 of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, on Christian persecution of Christians.

[44] Mahomet$_1$.AA. (See also Nestorius$_1$.E). However, this toleration was extended only to Christians, not Jews: as for the latter, Bayle notes that Mahomet persecuted them vehemently, both by the pen and by the sword (Mahomet$_1$.CC). See also Prideaux (*Life of Mahomet*, 156) and Gibbon (*Decline*, 3:202).

may be appropriate as far as Christian and Muslim *principles* are concerned, Bayle goes on to argue that, in terms of their respective *practices*, the very opposite is the case: "Mahometans, according to the principles of their faith, are obliged to employ violence for the destruction of other religions; and nevertheless they have tolerated them for several centuries. Christians have received orders only to preach and instruct; and nevertheless, since time immemorial, they have exterminated, by sword and fire, those who are not of their religion."[45] *That* Muslims are obliged to persecute, says Bayle, appears in the Qur'an, of which he quotes the famous passage in Sura 9, on the punishment of infidels. In Bayle's formulation:

> When you encounter the Infidels, kill them, cut off their heads, or take them prisoner, until they have paid their ransom or you see it fit to release them. Do not hesitate to persecute them, until they have laid down their arms, and submitted to you.[46]

In other words, Bayle is arguing that both Christian and Muslim practices are inconsistent with their principles: while the Christian principles dictate peace, their practice spells war; and the same, vice versa, is true for Islam.

Bayle then gives various examples in order to demonstrate that Christianity (again: especially, but not exclusively, the Catholic Church) has historically shown more signs of cruelty than Islam, and ends by making one of his favorite points: "The conclusion I would like to draw from this, is that men are rarely guided by their principles. See here the Turks, who tolerate all kinds of religions, although the Qur'an requires them to persecute the infidels; and see there the Christians, who do nothing but persecute, even though the Gospel forbids it."[47] And to complicate matters further, Bayle points out that, even in terms of its principles, Islam is not purely in favor of war and intolerance. To prove this, Bayle draws attention (in Remarks AA–BB) to an enigmatic Latin-Arabic manuscript: a "testament" supposedly drawn up between Mahomet and the monks of Saint Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai, in which Mahomet, at least in the beginning of his career, agreed to a policy of mutual toleration between Muslims

[45] Mahomet$_1$.AA.
[46] Mahomet$_1$.AA. Bayle seems to be reformulating slightly from Du Ryer's *Alcoran de Mahomet* (Paris: Antoine de Sommaville, 1647), 485, though elsewhere he cites the Qur'an in Bibliander's 1543 edition of the Latin translation by Ketton.
[47] Mahomet$_1$.AA. Toland (*Arabian Physician*, 8) paraphrases this passage in almost the exact same terms.

and Christians.[48] Bayle here refers to his earlier work, the *Pensées diverses*, which had discussed the same treaty, to argue that "Mahomet, having resolved to found a great empire and a new religion at the same time, affected a thousand appearances of kindness for the Christians, and announced in all the places where he was strongest that he intended to tolerate all kinds of religions, and particularly the Christian one."[49] See, for instance, says Bayle (quoted by Bayle), the following passage from the Qur'an, Sura 109, where Mahomet declares "in very vivid terms" [*en des termes fort expressifs*]: "o disbelievers, I do not worship what you worship, and you do not worship what I worship. Observe your law, and I will observe mine."[50] And Bayle notes that, although the other Sura (no. 9) calls for persecution, it also says that those who lay down their arms should be spared.[51]

By the end the reader can only be puzzled: have we reached any general conclusions about Islam? We have, but they must be picked out from a complex and sinuous chain of arguments, in which Bayle is alternately ceding the advantage to Christianity and withdrawing it. What Bayle seems to be saying is this: the Qur'an (and Islam) has principles of peace as well as of war. But what matters most is *practice*. In this, Islam is historically superior to Christianity. Let Christians realize this, and persecute no more: for if they do, not only are they traitors to their own principles, but they undermine their own apologetic arguments.

At several points in this discussion, Bayle quotes his aforementioned enemy Jurieu, another Protestant who had used the example of Islam in order to address the use of force in religion and conversion, thereby to attack Catholics—especially during the anti-Protestant campaign run by Louis XIV.[52] Jurieu had also made the point that Muslims had been more historically tolerant than Catholics, and so Bayle and Jurieu stood together in opposing the use of force by Catholics.[53] The Baylean subversion is that

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[48] Mahomet$_1$.AA, citing *Testamentum et pactiones initae inter Mohamedem et Christianae fidei cultores* (Paris: Antoine Vitré, 1630); Bayle notes that various scholars question its authenticity.

[49] Bayle, *Pensées diverses*, chap. 244, in *Œuvres diverses* (The Hague [Trévoux], 1737), 3:147.

[50] Ibid. Again, Bayle cites (with slight changes) from Du Ryer's *Alcoran*, 646.

[51] Bayle, *Pensées diverses* (*Œuvres diverses*, 3:147); see Du Ryer's *Alcoran*, 485.

[52] See esp. Jurieu, *Histoire du calvinisme*, 3:55: "la conduite des Sarrazins a été une débonnaireté évangélique, en comparaison de celle du Papisme, qui a surpassé la cruauté des Cannibales" (Mahomet$_1$.AA).

[53] However, Jurieu also portrays Muslims as "naturellement barbares et ennemis des sciences" (*Histoire*, 3:56; see Gunny, "Reactions," 133). Bayle, in contrast, shows a great awareness of Islam's rich tradition in the arts and sciences, but in most cases where the Islamic tradition is praised, this is *despite* Islam. Israel (*Enlightenment Contested*, 615–

this argument is now subtly redirected towards Protestants as well as Catholics, for Bayle saw Jurieu's own pro-war mentality as proof that violent tendencies existed in Protestants as well. Thus it is *through* Jurieu that Bayle's discussion of Islam contains an element of attack against the persecution practices of not only Catholics, but Christians in general, including his own Protestant party. And this, by the way, is also why Bayle's discussion of fanaticism and imposture links the case of Mahomet to that of Jurieu.[54]

For Bayle, then, the point of talking about war and Islam is to plead for universal religious toleration—and this means that, despite Bayle's rejection of the kind of Christian history that interprets facts according to theological exigencies, Bayle is himself writing more as a philosopher than a historian: he is rewriting the history of Islam in such a way as to make Christians reflect critically upon themselves.

SEX

Sexual Morality and Attitudes towards Women in Islam

If a large part of the article on Mahomet is devoted to discussions of war and violence, an even greater part is devoted to an exposition of the sexual morality and practices of Muslims in general, and of Mahomet in particular. Again, this interest on Bayle's part has a history in Western thought: Christian apologists had traditionally contrasted the supposed lascivious sexual morality of Muslims with the more restrained or "civilized" morality of Christians, and the lustfulness of Mahomet with the purity of Christ.[55] By doing so, they were able to argue that various Muslim precepts were inspired by Mahomet's personal desires: thus Prideaux presents a variety of examples to demonstrate that Mahomet "made his Imposture serve his Lust."[56] The Qur'an, therefore, was seen as pandering both to the desires of Mahomet and of Muslim men in general.

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39) seems correct in pointing out a pattern of connections between enlightened Arabs and the theme of (suspected) atheism; e.g., in Averroes$_2$, Mahomet II$_2$, Takiddin$_1$.A. Hence, Bayle seems to see Islam itself (or religion in general) as irrational, but this doesn't mean that Arabs or Muslims are naturally ignorant, as Jurieu suggests. See also the article Aristote, which stresses that Aristotelianism is still widespread in the Muslim world despite the "ignorance" that reigns there.

[54] See Van der Lugt, *Bayle*, 129–33.

[55] Lyons, *Islam*, 67–71, 163–75; Daniel, *Islam*, 118ff; Tolan, "European Accounts," 233.

[56] Prideaux, *Life of Mahomet*, 154 (also 138, 149). Gibbon doesn't quite challenge this

Bayle is broadly in agreement with this instrumentalist or Machiavellian image of Mahomet. For instance, he says in Remark T, it was because Mahomet himself had several wives and slept with his servants that he provided revelations allowing for limited polygamy and unlimited concubinage. This is one of the reasons he gives for believing that Mahomet was an impostor rather than a fanatic: only impostors would be so willing to adjust their revelations according to their (personal or political) interests.[57]

In a long sequence of Remarks, furthermore, Bayle elaborately discusses Mahomet's relations with women. This begins in Remark E, where Bayle points out that Mahomet did not win the affection of his wives, whom he treated badly: he was unfaithful and he beat them, and even made a law permitting husbands to beat their wives, after he himself had been caught beating one of his.[58] In Remark S, Bayle notes that many singular things are told of Mahomet's "vigor" with regard to women. He points out, for instance, that "authors are in disagreement about the exact number of Mahomet's wives, but they generally agree that he had several at the same time, and that he acquitted himself of the conjugal function with great force."[59] According to some, Bayle continues, Mahomet had up to twenty-one wives, excluding mistresses; while others say he only married seventeen, fifteen, fourteen, eleven, nine, or as few as three wives.[60] As for Mahomet's "*force*" or "*vigueur*," one source suggests that it was so great that in one hour he was able to "know" (in the biblical sense) each of his eleven wives, one after the other. Obviously amused, Bayle mentions this anecdote twice.[61]

Further on, in Remark II, Bayle discusses a story, recounted by various Mahometan as well as Christian authors, that the archangel Gabriel taught Mahomet how to make a certain "*ragoût*" that fortified his loins. At the mention of "ragout," we would nowadays think of a stew or sauce, but in seventeenth-century French it meant something closer to an appetizer: something that gives "*goût*" or appetite; and in a sexual context, as we

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suggestion as much as he revaluates it: thus, "the fragments of the Koran were produced at the discretion of Mahomet; each revelation is suited to the emergencies of his policy or passion . . ." (*Decline*, 3:181).

[57] Mahomet$_1$.T.

[58] Mahomet$_1$.E.

[59] Mahomet$_1$.S. See Boulainvilliers, *Vie de Mahomed*, 261; Gibbon, *Decline*, 3:215.

[60] Mahomet$_1$.S. Voltaire and Gibbon would later contrast Mahomet's "modesty" in this respect with "the seven hundred wives, and three hundred concubines of the wise Solomon" (Gibbon, *Decline*, 3:215; see Voltaire, *Essai*, 1:281–82).

[61] Mahomet$_1$.S. See Prideaux (*Life of Mahomet*, 149) for similar comments on "the old *Lecher*" (152).

have here, we could think of it as an aphrodisiac.[62] Having taken this Gabrielite love drug, Mahomet was able to have sex forty times without getting tired. Either that, or to fight against forty men—whichever he pleased.[63]

It may be clear from this that Bayle's emphasis on Mahomet's vigor and voluptuousness surpasses its argumentative value: Bayle is indeed trying to lay bare the contingent and possibly Machiavellian sources of Mahomet's religion, but in the meantime he is amusing himself and his reader by laying bare the body of Mahomet, and the bodies of his wives.

Women in Islam

These wives and women are not introduced for merely aesthetic purposes: Bayle takes their position very seriously, to the point of developing what one might anachronistically call a series of feminist arguments. For instance, if we go back to Remark Q, we find Bayle repeating his earlier point that Mahomet's law was very bad for women:

> The permission he accords to men to have several wives, and to whip them when they do not obey, and to divorce them when they no longer please, is a law very disadvantageous to the fair sex. Mahomet was careful not to accord to women the permission of having several men, and he did not even allow them to leave their troublesome husbands, at least not without their permission.[64]

Bayle then elaborates on the "deplorable" condition of Mahomet's four wives under a law that gives the husband the right to deprive these wives of "that which is rightly theirs," and to "amuse himself with pretty slaves," as many as he could buy.[65] "Doesn't this redistribution of the marriage funds result in indigence and extreme suffering [*une extrême souffrance*]?"[66] One might object that the law solves this inconvenience by giving each of the wives the right to sleep with their husband once a week—but this, to Bayle, is a poor solution, for a "law that reduces to small portions

[62] See Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire universelle* (The Hague/Rotterdam: Arnout and Reinier Leers, 1690), 3:295: lemma *Ragoût*.
[63] Mahomet$_1$.II.
[64] Mahomet$_1$.Q. In the margin, Bayle adds various quotes from the twelfth-century Latin Qur'an translation by Robert of Ketton.
[65] Mahomet$_1$.Q.
[66] Mahomet$_3$.Q (sentence added in third edition).

that which would hardly suffice if it were entire" is still a very harsh law. Furthermore, a thing like this should not be "*œuvre de commande*"; if the act is only done perfunctorily, that can hardly be "*un grand ragoût*": a big "turn on." Let us admit, therefore, Bayle concludes, that Mahomet was very harsh towards the female sex.[67]

Thus Bayle explicitly acknowledges that female bodies have desires; that these come with certain rights over the bodies of their husbands; and that Mahomet's law (as Bayle assembles it from his sources) is unfair to women. This proto-feminist moment is intensified when Bayle goes on to discuss the Mahometan views of paradise and of women's place in it. Not only, says Bayle, was Mahomet's law very bad for women in *this* life, he even deprived them of the joys of paradise, where men can enjoy all the "pleasures of marriage" with gorgeous maidens, while women, according to most authors, cannot enter paradise themselves: they can only watch from its fences what goes on inside. Could one imagine, asks Bayle, a crueler thing?[68] Various other mischievous quotes follow on the subject of sex in the Mahometan paradise, but by now Bayle is simply indulging the reader's taste (and his own) for spicy stories, and has lost sight of his main argument: the curious quasi-libertine–quasi-Christian claim that in Islam female bodies are made subservient to male bodies, and female feelings and desires are disregarded, both in this world and in the next.

In a later Remark, however, Bayle comes back to the role of women in the history of Islam. Remark PP, added in the second edition, discusses the position of Mahomet's favorite wife, Aisha or Ayesha, who had great authority after Mahomet's death, becoming almost a female Pope ("*Papesse*") among the Muslims. Bayle remarks how strange it is that Islam is so disadvantageous to women, considering that, first of all, it was founded by a very lubricious man; second, its laws were first placed in the hands of a woman (Mahomet's first wife, Khadija); and third, that after Mahomet's death, Ayesha was in the position to interpret these laws as she pleased. Why then didn't Ayesha protect her own sex, when she was in the position to do so? Bayle does not know the answer to this question, but he does ask the reader to "consider . . . the influences of the [female] sex on the foundation of Islam."[69]

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[67] Mahomet$_1$.Q.

[68] Mahomet$_1$.Q. Adriaan Reland (*Of the Mahometan Religion* [London, 1712], 77; *De religione Mohammedica*, 151) would later argue against the common assumption that Mahomet was so "hard-hearted towards the Women, as to exclude them from Heaven." (Likewise Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, 1:285; Gibbon, *Decline*, 3:189). And in fact Bayle himself corrects Rycaut on this point in Hali-Beigh$_1$.C.

[69] Mahomet$_2$.PP.

What Bayle is criticizing throughout these Remarks is not Muslim sexual morality per se—since Bayle is well aware that Christians, though they make a fuss about fidelity and abstinence in principle, are at least as lascivious in practice—but the double standard that accompanies this morality, and the ways in which men use religious and moral laws to suppress women. He is criticizing the fact that, in Islam as he sees it, wives have hardly any sexual rights, only duties—and what about concubines and serving girls, who have no rights at all?[70] In the course of this critique he effectively acknowledges that women have sexual desires, which gives them certain rights: such as the right of exclusive use of their husbands' bodies, since their husbands have exclusive use of theirs. A principle, then, of sexual reciprocity, and behind this, at least implicitly, of some sort of equality.

But at least the Muslims' principles match their practices on this score, which is more than can be said of the rigid sexual morality of Christians: as Bayle repeatedly points out, Christian principles with regard to sex are as divergent from their actual practices as their pacifist principles are divergent from their practices of violence.[71] In other articles, Bayle expresses irony and even skepticism about various aspects of Christian morality: such as the institution of marriage; the Christian obsession with female, but not male, virginity; the exaggerated rejection of sex and parenthood out of wedlock; and how it is always women who are blamed for any transgression of these high standards.[72] The social shame inflicted upon unmarried pregnant women is so great, says Bayle in the article "Patin," that it leads to dead bodies: to women preferring to kill their babies, or themselves, rather than to suffer such disgrace. The suggestion seems to be that, if Christian morals were a bit more liberal, or libertine, this would not be the case.[73]

So what is Bayle doing throughout the many obscene passages in the *Dictionnaire*, which shocked and/or excited so many of his readers? What, more specifically, is he doing in the article "Mahomet," where so much attention is paid to the needs, desires, and workings of not only Mahomet's

[70] Bayle only speaks of servant girls in Mahomet$_1$.T; for instance, that Mahomet slept with his servant Marina before she was of a nubile age. On the predicament of female servants, see also Patin$_2$.F and Ales$_2$.D.

[71] E.g., Vayer$_2$.H, which argues that marital vows of "fidelité conjugale" are kept just as rarely as monastic vows of celibacy; also Ermite$_2$.I.

[72] E.g. Ariosta$_2$.A, Patin$_1$.C.D, Patin$_2$.E.F.

[73] E.g. Patin; here I am following the interpretation of David Wootton, "Pierre Bayle, Libertine?," in *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. M. A. Stewart (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 197–226.

body, but also the bodies of his wives? Is he attacking Christian morality to the point of defending a "looser" pagan morality? But what about the ideal of the ascetic scholar and dispassionate philosopher who lives his life away from the world—an ideal that he also seemed to espouse, not only in the *Dictionnaire*, but in his personal life? As one of his friends, Henri Basnage de Beauval, wrote in the year after Bayle's death, "certain passages of his *Dictionary* will cause some to suspect he loved women, though he always kept considerable distance [*beaucoup d'éloignement*] from them."[74]

Though some of the more voyeuristic episodes in "Mahomet" might seem to suggest otherwise, Bayle's self-presentation as world-weary scholar was probably accurate: we know from his letters that he devoted himself completely to his scholarship, working for as many hours a day as was possible without becoming ill.[75] Scholarship seems to have been his main source of pleasure: he really loved it—as you can tell from the *Dictionnaire*. His argument that scholarly pleasure surpasses sexual pleasure may seem ironic, but it was perhaps also grounded in experience.

However, we should not forget that scholarship for Bayle could itself have a sexual side; hence the display in the *Dictionnaire* of something that today might seem a contradiction in terms: sexy erudition. This was partly to spice up the often dry material of the *Dictionnaire* and to entertain his readers, but also because sex is part of life and part of history: hence, it has a proper place in history-writing, and no historian should shy away from it. "This is a historical dictionary," Bayle would say later in defense of the "obscenities" in his work, and an article on the famous courtesan Laïs has as much a place in it as an article on Lucretius.[76]

Bayle, then, does not appear to be defending loose morals in general, certainly not for scholars, and least of all for himself. But suppressing sex will lead only to hypocrisy and double standards, where women are at a definite disadvantage. Being silent about it, in Bayle's view, won't do any good; nor will vague words, metaphors, and euphemisms. It doesn't really matter what words you use to describe the "conjugal act," says Bayle: whether you say "he enjoyed her," "he had her company," "they have had commerce together," "he has received the last favor from her," or "she has let him have the most precious thing she owned," this will conjure up the

[74] Henri Basnage de Beauval, "Avis au lecteur" (in Bayle, *Œuvres diverses*, 4:2). English translation Michael Hickson, in Bayle, *Dialogues of Maximus and Themistius*, ed. Hickson (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 123.

[75] Which is not to say he did not have a social life: see, e.g., Van Lieshout, *Making*, 162–74.

[76] Bayle, "Eclaircissement sur les obscénités" (first published in 1702).

same images in the mind of the hearer as it would had Michelangelo painted it on a canvas.[77]

Hence, there is also a political element at play in Bayle's deliberate inclusion of obscenities in the *Dictionnaire*: Bayle is liberating the realm of discourse as well as (to some extent) that of morality. The point of the libertine passages is not so much their content, but the fact that they are there. In this sense, the *Dictionnaire* can be said to represent a blueprint for radical expression: a model for what Enlightened society should be like. It is not that everything can be done, but that everything can and must be said. All aspects of existence must be named: whether they be heresy, irreligion, philosophy, or obscenity (though Bayle draws the line at calumny, invective speech, and warmongering). What Bayle appears to be saying is that one can and should talk about sex—even if one is not having it oneself.

CONCLUSION: FROM BAYLE TO GIBBON

Edward Gibbon, in a footnote to his own chapter on Mahomet and Islam in the *Decline and Fall*, made the following comment: "In the article of Mahomet, Bayle has shewn how indifferently wit and philosophy supply the absence of genuine information."[78] True, this curious article is a mixture of all kinds of sources. Discussions are engraved into longer theological and literary traditions, while constantly subverting, improvising, experimenting —and Bayle, in speaking about Muslims, is often addressing or criticizing Christians. As Jean Gagnier would comment in 1723, Bayle's "Mahomet" is perhaps more a philosopher's article than a historian's.[79]

At the same time, Gibbon is being a bit harsh. In resisting the common tendency of fitting Islam into a Christian story—and indeed, of fitting *Christianity* into a Christian story—Bayle is effecting a change in the writing of religious history and preparing the way for Gibbon himself. If he is sometimes (or most of the time) erratic in his use of sources, he is also trying to be critical.

This critical and to some extent naturalistic impulse is also what lies behind Bayle's recurrent critique of miracles and legends that are told about

[77] Ibid., trans. Richard Popkin, in Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*, ed. Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 436.
[78] Gibbon, *Decline*, 3:190.
[79] Especially in the Remarks: see Jean Gagnier, preface to Abu'l-Fida, *De vita et rebus gestis Mohammedis* (Oxford, 1723), iii: "Is in hoc Argumento, pro ingenio suo, Philosophicè magis, quàm Historicè, praesertim in Notis suis amplissimis versatus est."

Mahomet (see the first "minor" theme above), some of which are reminiscent of legends told about Moses and even Christ, though Bayle does not make this connection explicit.[80] For instance, Bayle mentions and deconstructs a story that Mahomet was able to feed eighty men with four small measures of barley, and all his troops with a handful of dates.[81] Surely Christian readers will have been reminded of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. Bayle deconstructs such stories by criticizing the tendency of Christian apologists to exaggerate legends told about Mahomet that are often completely apocryphal, recounted neither in the Qur'an nor in other authoritative Arabic sources. Bayle compares this to the Protestant tendency to exaggerate Catholic stories about saints that most authors don't believe or even mention.[82] This is not an equitable way of engaging in theological controversy—let alone of writing history.

In moments like this Bayle appears to be seeking to de-mythologize Christian via Muslim mythology; or at least to recast religious history in a way that cancels out any role for the divine, miraculous, or supernatural. This project can be explicit for Islam in a way that it cannot be for Christianity, but the implications are obvious. When Bayle speaks about providentialism in "Mahomet," he does so in very hypothetical terms: *if* we want to preserve proof of Christianity's divinity, we have to talk about history in such and such a way. But what if we did *not* care about proving it: how then can we talk about history? Gibbon knew the answer to this, as did Bayle—and though the latter didn't quite follow through, in the *Dictionnaire* the possibility of a naturalistic history of religion may be glimpsed on the horizon.

Far from being "indifferent," furthermore, Bayle's use of wit and philosophy was pointed and creative, since it enabled him to reverse the traditional images of Islam as a violent religion and Christianity as the peaceful one, thus criticizing modern persecution tendencies in Catholics but also Protestants, while at the same time steering close to an idea (albeit a very

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[80] For this argument, see Badir, *Voltaire*, 53–54. Note that the debunking (and ridiculing) of Mahometan miracles was a well-established Christian tradition (see Pailin, *Attitudes*, 87–89), but usually this was done in order to bulwark a Christian providential discourse; that second impulse is absent in Bayle.

[81] Mahomet$_1$.H; also Mahomet$_1$.EE and Mahomet$_2$.FF, critiquing a story about Mahomet's tomb being suspended in the air. Bayle also anatomizes Muslim superstition in various other articles on Islam: e.g., Abudhaher$_1$, Agar$_1$.I.K, Mècque$_2$ and especially Fatime$_1$, where we may see an implicit allusion to Mary in Bayle's portrayal of Muslim worship of Mahomet's daughter Fatima as a virgin, even though she had various children (esp. Fatima$_1$.E). See also Nephes Ogli$_1$, about a Turkish phrase for "Child of the Holy Spirit" ("*fils du Saint Esprit*"), given to children who are born of a virgin mother.

[82] Mahomet$_1$.H.

hypothetical one) of sexual liberation—liberation, at least, in speech, if not in acts. One might think of the *Dictionnaire* as aiming for a "discursive" Enlightenment, situated in the realm of discourse, testing the boundaries of freedom of thought as well as of speech.

Hence, Bayle's account of Islam does revolve around the traditional axes of sex, violence, and deceit, but in each of these themes, there is some confusion in the purpose and character of Bayle's activity: is he talking about Islam, or about Christianity? Clearly, Bayle was doing both. But then again, so was Gibbon.[83] And so were most historians of Islam before them, and after them. In speaking about Islam, the West has always tended to be speaking about itself. As a result, the view afforded on Islam through Western eyes has traditionally been more like a view in a mirror than one through a looking glass—and a "deforming mirror" at that.[84] The difference we can perceive at the turn of the eighteenth century is in the kind of image that is refracted back to Christianity via Islam: and this is where Bayle, Gibbon, and various other authors of the dawning Enlightenment were doing something new. While attempting to write an objective and impartial history of Islam, they were also drafting a programmatic critique of Christian history-writing, as well as of Christian politics, religion, and morality. And this, indeed, is a very modern thing.

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[83] There are many moments when Gibbon is speaking less than a historian than as a philosopher: he often uses Islam to attack Christianity, especially with regard to miracles, priestcraft, dogmas, sexual morality, and hypocrisy (see Lewis, *Islam*, 96–97; Foster, *Melancholy Duty,* 313, 321–29). He also makes some dubious claims about the history of Islam, arguing, for instance, that "metaphysical questions . . . have never engaged the passions of the people or disturbed the tranquillity of the state" (Gibbon, *Decline*, 3:230–31). As Lewis (*Islam*, 97) argues, the suggestion that Islam has been "free from schism and strife" is "manifestly wrong."

[84] Tolan, "European Accounts," 249.